

SUGAR  
BABE



LEATHER BOOTS and long hook are handy items for Fern Graham's snake hunting excursions.

## Retirement No Rest For Clearfield Couple

By MARGE SILVESTER  
Review Correspondent

CLEARFIELD — Retirement for most people brings thoughts of quiet leisure hours puttering in the garden or pursuing hobbies long ago left to wait for the magic day of "things to do when we retire."

Many retirees generally stick around home and putter, but not Ben and Fern Graham.

Ben retired from Hill Air Force Base in 1976, where he had worked for 15 years. Prior to that time he was employed at the Navy Base for 20 years. He also owns the Clearfield Nursery and Power Equipment at 1161 S. State Street, a family operated venture.

While Mr. Graham worked at the Base, Mrs. Graham and the children kept things going at the Nursery. Together they planned for the day when they could retire and travel. When Mr. Graham retired in 1976 they bought a motor home and traveled as much as possible.

In the fall and winter they travel to Florida and the southern states. Hot summer months find them going to the northern areas of Glacier National Park, Yellowstone Park and Washington.

Mrs. Graham is a lover of birds and animals and is fascinated by snakes, a fact which prompted them to attend the Sweetwater, Texas Rattlesnake Roundup, one of the oldest and largest hunts of its kind. Ranchers open their lands to the hunters and help them out by making note of snake holes they see as they work the land.

Snakes are gathered the first week of March when hunters go to the ranchlands with gasoline tanks, fitted with a long hose to extend into the holes. When a hole is found the gasoline is sprayed into it, forcing the snakes to come out. Because it is still chilly, the snakes are sluggish and can be caught more easily with a snake hook, which has the appearance of a golf club handle with a "U" shaped hook attached to the end, which scoops the snakes off the ground.

"People bring them in boxes, trash cans and all kinds of containers to be weighed by the JayCees, who sponsor the Sweetwater Roundup celebration," said Mrs. Graham.

venom sold for research and antivenom. Every part of the reptile is used, Mr. Graham explained, with the meat being breaded and fried and sold, as well as the rattles, skin and head.

Necessary equipment for the hunt is a snake hook and a good pair of leather boots. A mirror can come in handy too. The sun reflects off the mirror into the den and sometimes the snakes can be seen. "Expert hunters say they can smell the snakes in their dens because they give off an odor that smells like watermelon," said Mrs. Graham.

When not hunting snakes, the Graham's help the elderly. They were able to go to California to help an aunt. They also traveled to Goldthwaite, Texas when Mr. Graham's father became ill and had to be hospitalized.

"We can stay with our relatives longer and learn more about our families from the older people, and have been able to share family history with our children that we couldn't do otherwise because we wouldn't have the time to spend," said Mrs. Graham.

"We have to much fun traveling," she said. "If we want to stop, we stop. There is no hurry."

On one of their memorable trips they followed the coastline from Texas to Florida. While in Florida Mrs. Graham found a bright green frog. She brought the frog home and planted a terrarium for it and placed mesh on the top to keep it contained. She "misted" it every day and she and her grandchildren caught flies for two years before the frog died.

During the same trip, raccoons caused havoc with their motor home when they got into their apples, ruined some insulation and tried to come inside. "We were glad to leave there. We had quite a repair bill," she said.

As members of the Southern Baptist Church, they often visit churches along the way and have made a lot of friends in many states.

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Hunters are paid \$3 a pound the first day, \$2 per pound the second and \$1 a pound the third day of the roundup. A record 18,000 pounds of rattlesnakes were gathered this year. The previous record was 9,000 pounds. Prizes are given for the biggest and smallest snakes caught.

The snakes are put into the pit, about three feet deep, in the Nolan County, Sweetwater Coliseum, and there they are milked and the

venom sold for research and antivenoms. Every part of the reptile is used, Mr. Graham explained, with the meat being breaded and fried and sold, as well as the rattles, skin and head.

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Preparation for retirement came early. "When the children were growing up, we made a point to take a yearly vacation. We felt like it was beneficial to all of us," said Mr. Graham. "After retirement, we bought the motor home and have had a ball ever since."

It is apparent that retirement agrees with them and both have definite ideas for being happy in retirement.

Says Mrs. Graham, "Don't pull up your roots. Plan early, get a hobby and realize that it doesn't take a lot of money to travel. And, above all, be happy."